

*He Lei Ho'oheno no nā Kau a Kau:
Language, Performance, and Form in
Hawaiian Poetry*

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KA'INA (INTRODUCTION)

Hawaiian poetry is the poetry produced by Kānaka Maoli (Native Hawaiians), the indigenous inhabitants genealogically connected to the archipelago known to the world as Hawai'i.¹ It is not regional in nature, that is, it is not simply the product of anyone who claims Hawai'i as home. Nor is it thematic; it is not just any poem about Hawai'i. Since European contact in 1778, differing cultural values have informed Hawaiian poetry. Surprisingly little attention has been given to the ways in which Hawaiian poetry has been categorized and studied from either haole (western) or maoli (indigenous) perspectives. This article is an examination of contemporary Hawaiian poetry, with special attention to issues of language, performance, and form. I focus on contemporary Hawaiian poetry written, recorded, and published over the past twenty years by Kanaka Maoli poets, whether composed in English, Hawaiian, Hawai'i Creole English (HCE), or combinations of these languages.² The purpose of this analysis is to demonstrate the different strands of cultural and linguistic influence that have helped to shape the development of this dynamic genre of contemporary Hawaiian artistic expression. Because of the diversity of influences on contemporary Hawaiian poetry, I suggest that a lei is an appropriate metaphor for it.

The development of Hawaiian verbal arts, orature, and literature—including Hawaiian poetry—can be defined in many ways. For example, in the 1970s, Hawaiian language scholar Rubellite Kawena Johnson established different periods and categories for Hawaiian verbal and written arts (see Johnson 2001). In 1980, English professor Leialoha Apo Perkins contextualized the development of Hawaiian literature as a Pacific-linked

and Pacific-informed subset of American literature (Perkins 1980). In the 1990s, Kamehameha Schools English teacher Monica Ka'imipono Kaiwi identified different "generations" of Hawaiian literature, extending the important cultural idea of mo'okū'auhau (genealogy) to literary texts (Kaiwi 2001). Each scholar has acknowledged a Hawaiian language-based orature prior to western contact as the foundation on which the postcontact literary traditions were formed, from the 1820s onward, once writing was established. Initially, oral and written works were composed in ka 'ōlelo Hawai'i (the Hawaiian language), but these were mostly supplanted by English-language compositions by the mid-twentieth century. It is important to note, however, that despite a haole-imposed ban on the Hawaiian language after the Hawaiian government was overthrown in 1893, 'ōlelo Hawai'i never completely died out; and since the establishment of Hawaiian language immersion education programs in the mid-1980s, it has made a small, but determined, comeback.

As the works of Johnson, Perkins, and Kaiwi clearly demonstrate, Hawaiian literature, and more specifically, poetry, can be defined, categorized, and studied in many ways. Although all forms of categorization invite criticism, the diversity is often necessary. Thus the question "What is contemporary Hawaiian poetry?" inevitably invites more than one response. In this article I offer a working definition on which to build my argument. First, the English terms *poem* and *poetry* are defined by a single word in Hawaiian: *mele*. In contrast, Mary Kawena Pukui and Samuel H. Elbert's *Hawaiian Dictionary* defines *mele* as "song, anthem, or chant of any kind; poem, poetry; to sing, chant" (1986, 245). While songs, chants, and poems are considered separate genres in Anglo-American literary traditions, in Hawaiian literary traditions they often overlap; the primary distinctions among them come from the mode of performance: a song is sung, a chant is chanted, a poem is recited.

Each of these performance modes can also be interpreted in a myriad of ways, which adds to the vast repertoire of performance styles to choose from. Another term, *poema* (a Hawaiianization of the word *poem*) is occasionally but not commonly used to distinguish contemporary Hawaiian poems written in English from the above-mentioned forms of *mele*. Hawaiian songs and chants, especially those composed in the Hawaiian language, make up a large body of Hawaiian poetry, which has already been subject to academic investigation by scholars such as Amy Ku'ulei-aloha Stillman, Puakea Nogelmeier, Samuel H. Elbert, Noelani Mahoe, and others. While highly worthy of study, this massive category of *mele* is

not significantly addressed in this essay. Instead, I focus on the third category of Hawaiian mele, poetry, which has not received as much attention.

As Johnson’s work demonstrated, Hawaiian poetry can be broadly classified by time period. General historical distinctions can be made through the use of the terms *traditional Hawaiian poetry* and *contemporary Hawaiian poetry*. I acknowledge that the term *traditional* itself is always suspect; combined with the phrase *Hawaiian poetry* it may be even more so. Yet this term is commonly applied to all mele composed in the precontact era, and today it embraces Hawaiian-language based compositions through the 1950s. Here I use the term *traditional* generally to identify Hawaiian mele composed using recognized techniques (such as linked assonance); genres (such as mele inoa, or name songs); and Hawaiian language as the medium of composition. The broad “traditional” category invites further subclassification, including time (precontact, nineteenth century, early twentieth century, later twentieth century) and mode (Hawaiian, English, or hapa haole [mele that mix English and Hawaiian words, stanzas, or phrases]).

I apply the term *contemporary Hawaiian poetry* to all poems composed from the 1960s to the present, although technically it could be used to mark all compositions in the postcontact era, particularly those that demonstrate western influence in topic or form (such as mele for sailing vessels, which proliferated in the nineteenth century). The 1960s is an appropriate dividing line, as it marks the beginning of an important transition in Hawaiian culture, known today as the “Hawaiian Renaissance.” As in the late nineteenth century, when King David La‘amea Kalākaua inspired previous cultural reawakenings, the 1960s began a period of renewed interest in Hawaiian arts and culture, along with social and political activism. It sparked the “Hawaiian movement,” as Kānaka Maoli have fought to regain our native land base and native political power through sovereignty and self-determination initiatives; to regrow our ‘ōlelo ‘ōiwi (Hawaiian language) through the establishments of kula kaiāpuni (Hawaiian language immersion schools); and to reinvigorate our cultural arts such as dance, chant, music, and literature, including poetry.

The creative element in Kanaka Maoli poetry is not limited to growing a new body of literature. Kanaka Maoli poets are also striving to compose in a manner reflecting different influences, from traditional Hawaiian metaphor, imagery, and kaona (hidden, underlying, or multiple meanings), to Anglo-American and other forms of writing. Metaphor, imagery, and kaona are so important in Kanaka Maoli poetry that, for poets and

critics alike, they often supercede all other elements. In both the production and study of Hawaiian poetry, other aspects of the poem, such as form, are often overlooked. A number of articles on Hawaiian mele define, describe, and explain in detail the various metaphors, images, and kaona employed in Hawaiian poetry; but the subject of *form* in Hawaiian poetry has not yet been studied in depth.

Unlike other, non-Hawaiian genres of poetry that stress adherence to strict rules of form (such as haiku, or various types of sonnets), adherence to strict rules of form is not, at first glance, a significant element of Hawaiian poetry. However, it is a *necessary* part of Hawaiian poetry in a way perhaps best described metaphorically. One of the most important cultural and poetic metaphors for Hawaiians is the lei. Defined as a “garland, wreath, or necklace of flowers,” the kaona of the lei metaphor is much deeper, as Pukui wrote: “There are many loving strands in the word lei which means not only a string of flowers to be worn and later cast aside” (1976, 65). Lei are also symbols of affection, figuratively referring to a beloved child or sweetheart. A lei is also “a chanted poem or song [sometimes] accompanying a flower lei that is given to a person esteemed, especially an ali‘i (chief). When the lei of flowers withered and was discarded, the lei of poetry remained always as a reminder of a happy occasion” (Pukui 1976, 63).

The traditional haku (braided) lei is an especially appropriate metaphor to describe the importance of form to Hawaiian poetry. A haku lei consists of three strands of cordage, typically leaves from the strong but supple ti plant (*Cordyline fruitcosa*). As the ti leaves are braided together, flowers and foliage are inserted between the strands and secured in place by tightly twisting the leaves together. When completed, the ti-leaf base is entirely obscured by the flowers; thus a well-made lei is aesthetically pleasing both on the top side (where the flowers protrude) and on the underside (worn against the skin). The flowers are evenly spaced, not bunched up on one end and lacking on the other, with puka (holes) in between; there is a consistent, regular pattern of color, shape, and size, demonstrating forethought and purpose—like a well-made poem.

This metaphor is applicable to the topic of form and Hawaiian poetry in several ways. First is the overlapping meanings found in the terms: The verb *haku* means “to compose, invent, put in order, arrange; to braid, as a lei.” Haku refers both to lei making and poetry, as haku mele are poets or composers of song or chant, or those who speak in proverbs. Both lei and mele are composed, with the mea haku (one who composes) select-

ing, arranging, and putting in order the pua—literally, the flowers; in poetry, the metaphors and symbolic imagery that evoke kaona.³ In the precontact era, this was achieved orally in the Hawaiian language; today Hawaiian poets compose on paper in Hawaiian, English, and Hawai‘i Creole English.

Second is the importance of the base that gives structure to the lei or mele. In Hawaiian, the word for form is *kino*, which also means “body.” Without the braided ti-leaf cords to hold it together, the lei would not be a lei—a scattering of flowers, a gathered bouquet, perhaps, but not a lei. Likewise, without a general acknowledgement of form, Hawaiian mele would not be poetry: puana (utterances), mo‘olelo (story), or rhetoric, but not poetry. Both lei pua (flower lei) and lei mele (poetic composition) highlight the pua (flowers/metaphors); without the underlying structure to organize and hold them in the shape of lei and poem, they would still be beautiful, but they would not be lei.

Third is the interweaving of traditions, represented by the braided strands. Contemporary Hawaiian poetry descends from at least two traditions, one native and the other foreign, which, like the different interwoven strands of the haku lei, are combined to hold fast, giving both shape and beauty to the lei (poem). For nearly two thousand years of cultural practice prior to western contact, Hawaiian verbal arts—including poetry—developed to a high and sophisticated state. As mentioned earlier, complex metaphors, imagery and symbolic language, and kaona were vital elements underlying the cultural and aesthetic value placed on Hawaiian poetry. Yet other factors, such as mnemonic devices, repetition, rhythm, and rhyme schemes, cannot be overlooked. Most important, perhaps, is the development of the arts within the nurturing embrace of the Hawaiian language, which has allowed Hawaiian poetry to grow in a way impossible to achieve in English or any other language. Thus it is the ‘ōlelo ‘ōiwi, the Hawaiian language itself, that has influenced traditional Hawaiian poetic forms.

With the introduction of writing and exposure to other languages in the nineteenth century, the lei mele Hawai‘i, or “lei of Hawaiian poetry” began to be woven with new strands: no longer strictly oral, many compositions were written and published in the numerous Hawaiian-language newspapers that flourished during the period (see Chapin 1996; Mookini 1974). As the century progressed, Hawaiians began to add English and other foreign words to their compositions, demonstrated by mele such as “Ku‘u Pua i Paoakalani,” penned by Queen Lili‘uokalani in 1895 during

her imprisonment in 'Iolani Palace (1999, 63). The first stanza fluidly blends Hawaiian and English in this poignant mele:

E ka gentle breeze e waft mai nei	O gentle breeze that blows softly here,
Ho'ohāli'ali'a mai ana ia'u	Bringing fond memories to me,
E ku'u sweet never fading flower	O my sweet never fading flower
I bloom i ka uka o Paoakalani.	That blooms inland of Paoakalani.

After the Hawaiian language was banned near the end of the nineteenth century, Hawaiian-language compositions dwindled in number; even those that continued in performance through song decreased in number as they were replaced by hapa haole songs, which emphasized English lyrics and western tunes (Kanahele 1979). With the 1960s renaissance, Hawaiian poets wove English and Hawai'i Creole English with Hawaiian, largely ignoring the constraints of western forms. In this contemporary form, the lei mele Hawai'i has been beautifully braided with these different strands. Like a well-constructed lei, each strand has informed the other.

It would be difficult to address the topic of form and Hawaiian poetry without also discussing language, performance, metaphor, and kaona. In the next sections I trace the evolution of form and Hawaiian poetry both historically and thematically, in relation to these elements. The first strand I discuss is traditional Hawaiian poetry. Passed down verbally and archived in memory for many generations, the kino of traditional Hawaiian poetry has been shaped and influenced by Hawaiian language, orality, and performance. Next I examine the mele Hawai'i of the intermediary postcontact period, when Hawaiian and Anglo-American poetic aesthetics began to intertwine. Most notably, some forms, such as the mele ku'i ("strung" mele), followed western structures but retained Hawaiian language, metaphors, and images; composed on paper, they were still meant to be sung or danced as performance pieces. Finally, I look at the third strand, contemporary Hawaiian poetry in English. Unlike the first two, contemporary Hawaiian poetry has been strongly shaped and influenced by Anglo-American poetic aesthetics in some ways, while at the same time strongly resisting it, becoming something completely new, which, neither Hawaiian nor Anglo-American, stands on its own.⁴

MELE HAWAI'I: THE FORM-ATIVE YEARS

In her article, "Songs (Mele) of Old Ka'ū, Hawai'i," Pukui wrote, "There are many interesting characteristics of Hawaiian poetry. The lines were

not always the same length. This unevenness did not destroy the rhythm, or smoothness of the flow because there was never any attempt at rhyming the ends of the lines . . . a far more interesting characteristic was the importance of the meaning of words and thought” (1949, 247). Hawaiian-language kumu (teacher) Nogelmeier concurred: “The mechanics of the poetry do not demand uniform line length, nor is there a systematic meter” (2001, 3). Perkins stated more bluntly, “Form alone is not significant in Hawaiian poetics” (1980, 13). Yet some way of forming the poem had to exist in order for the composition to be classified as a poem, chant, or song. Hawaiian ethnomusicologist Stillman identified traditional oli ‘āla‘apapa (to tell publicly, as of the past) as “non-strophic” (that is, not having the same rhythm for successive stanzas); instead, she said, “the poetry came first . . . [so] haku mele composed lines as long as they wanted to in order to get through the thought” (2002). Therefore, traditional Hawaiian poetry could be categorized as narrative poetry. Given the argument that form is not important in Hawaiian poetry, one might infer that there is *no* structure, that all Hawaiian poetry is nothing more than free verse or open-form poetry. But just because traditional Hawaiian poetry does not fit into categories of western closed forms does not mean that it lacks a type of indigenous structure—and that structure can sometimes be found in its performance and purpose. As Nogelmeier wrote, Hawaiian poetry can be classified thematically, “on the basis of both content and form of presentation, including vocal technique” (2001, 3):

The main division is between mele oli, to be chanted without accompaniment, and mele hula, for dancing. Terminology is unevenly recorded and overlapping, but certain genres are generally acknowledged: ko‘i honua, mo‘okū‘auhau, ha‘i kūpuna, kāmākua (genealogy and origin chants); mele inoa, mele ma‘i, mele ho‘āla (name and personal chants); mele pana, mele aloha ‘āina (place or loyalty chants); mele pai ali‘i, mele ho‘ohanohano (chiefly or honorific chants); mele aloha, mele ho‘oipoipo (love chants); pule, kau (prayer or eulogy chants); mele nema, paha (criticizing or challenging chants); mele kāhea, mele komo, mele ka‘i, mele ho‘i (entry and procession chants); kanikau, mele kūmākena, kūō, uē helu (mourning chants). Overlaid upon these types of mele oli are terms for vocal styles and techniques that often identify closely with the poetic content and purpose. (Nogelmeier 2001, 3)

It is difficult to discuss oral forms of poetry on paper. Yet this discussion is aided by the vast number of precontact and early contact oral compositions that were written down by Hawaiians in the nineteenth century. Prior to the shift to writing in the early 1800s, haku mele did not have

the luxury of scratching notes on paper; they had to create every composition in memory. Thus they had to figure out a form of composition that would facilitate recollection, but still be poetic and aesthetically pleasing to the ear and tongue. And the haku mele of old discovered a form(ula) that worked, one that is exemplified in the epic chant of creation, the Kumulipo.

Mai ka Pō mai: Cosmic, Godly and Poetic Origins

One example of regulated form in traditional Hawaiian poetry is found in the Kumulipo, which literally translates as “[The] Source of Deep Darkness.” With a length of 2,108 lines, the Kumulipo recounts the beginnings of the Kanaka Maoli concept of the universe, through the evolution of all living creatures, culminating in the birth of kānaka (people), and the complex mo‘okū‘auhau (genealogical lines) from the first woman, La‘ila‘i, through her distant descendant, countless generations later, the Ali‘i Nui (high chief) Kalaninui‘īamamao, born sometime in the 1700s, two generations before the birth of Kamehameha (Beckwith 1972, 25). Painstakingly memorized and verbally passed down in hui (collectives) of ipu mo‘okū‘auhau (genealogists for the chiefs), the Kumulipo was not written down until 1881.⁵ It was first translated into English in 1897 by Queen Lili‘uokalani (Beckwith 1972, xi).

The Kumulipo is divided into sixteen wā (epochs, chapters). Following the important Hawaiian concept of pono (balance, harmony), the first eight wā are set in pō (night, darkness, chaos), the time when the heavens and earth are created, and plants, animals, and gods are born on the earth. Day breaks at the end of the eighth wā, which marks the dawn of ao (day, light, order) at which time human genealogies spring from godly ones. The sixteenth wā concludes with the birth of Kalaninui‘īamamao.

Pō

—Chaos, darkness, night
—time of the earth, creatures,
akua (gods)

1. lines 1–122 Kumulipo/Pō‘ele;
coral, shellfish
2. lines 123–272 Fish and plants
3. lines 273–377 Birds and plants

Ao

—Order, light, day
—time of nā kānaka (people)

9. lines 644–672 Children of La‘ila‘i
and Ki‘i
10. lines 673–707 Children of La‘ila‘i
and Kāne
11. lines 708–1545 Kamaha‘ina and
Hali‘a; the flood;

- | | |
|--|--|
| 4. lines 378–480 Reptiles and
insects; plants | 12. lines 1546–1734 Haumea and
Kanaloa |
| 5. lines 481–538 Pigs | 13. lines 1735–1813 Palikū
genealogy; Papa |
| 6. lines 539–565 Rats | 14. lines 1814–1929 Wākea; stars |
| 7. lines 566–594 Dogs | 15. lines 1930–2048 Maui genealogy |
| 8. lines 595–643 La‘ila‘i, Kāne,
and Ki‘i | 16. lines 2049–2102 Maui genealogy;
ends with Lonoikamakahiki |

Unlike the more familiar western scientific classification of animals, which typically moves from the microscopic and single celled to the large and complex, the Kumulipo uses a different system: a language-based structure which lends to the poetic rhythm of the chant.

Hānau ka <i>i‘a</i> , hānau ka <i>Nai‘a</i> i ke kai lā holo	Born is the <i>fish</i> , born the <i>Porpoise</i> in the sea, swimming
Hānau ka <i>Manō</i> , hānau ka <i>Moano</i> i ke kai lā holo	Born is the <i>Shark</i> , born the <i>Goatfish</i> in the sea, swimming
140 Hānau ka <i>Mau</i> , hānau ka <i>Maumau</i> i ke kai lā holo	Born is the <i>Mau</i> , born the <i>Maumau</i> in the sea, swimming
Hānau ka <i>Nana</i> , hānau ka <i>Mana</i> i ke kai lā holo	Born is the <i>Nana</i> , born the <i>Mana</i> in the sea, swimming
Hānau ka <i>Nake</i> , hānau ka <i>Make</i> i ke kai lā holo	Born is the <i>Nake</i> , born the <i>Make</i> in the sea, swimming
Hānau ka <i>Napa</i> , hānau ka <i>Nala</i> i ke kai lā holo	Born is the <i>Napa</i> , born the <i>Nala</i> in the sea, swimming
Hānau ka <i>Pala</i> , hānau ke <i>Kala</i> i ke kai lā holo	Born is the <i>Pala</i> , born the <i>Sturgeon</i> in the sea, swimming
145 Hānau ka <i>Paka</i> , hānau ka <i>Pāpā</i> i ke kai lā holo	Born is the <i>Paka eel</i> , born the <i>green</i> <i>crab</i> in the sea, swimming.

Two things are happening structurally, in this excerpt from the second wā. First, with the exception of the main noun or aquatic species being named, the lines are formulaic:

Hānau ka _____, hānau ka [or ke] _____ i ke kai lā holo

Thus, composing and reciting is a matter of “filling in the blank.” How did the haku mele choose? By employing the most common poetic device, rhyme. Here is a purposeful use of internal rhyme, linking one species of ocean creature to the next (shown in italics in this extract). Where to begin is easy enough to determine: with the broadest category imaginable: *i‘a*,

the generic name for fish. Throughout the second wā, the only other word that comes close to rhyming is *nai'a* (dolphin), and thus it becomes the only choice for the internal rhyming slot after *i'a*. The sound shifts a bit from *nai'a* to *manō* (shark), although both are similar two-syllable, four-letter words. They are matched another way, as both are large ocean creatures with similar body types, though this is not a primary consideration in other pairings. From there on, if one were to recite just the list of names in their order of appearance, it would roll off the tongue in a musical sequence of sound:

I'a / Nai'a
Mau / Maumau
Nake / Make
Pala / Kala
Manō / Moano
Nana / Mana
Napa / Nala
Paka / Pāpā

Once this structure is recognized, the daunting challenge of memorizing and verbally recalling over two thousand lines of text is minimized. The phrase, “Hānau ka ___, hānau ka ___ i ke kai lā holo” is recounted thirty times in this wā, with thirty sets of names rhythmically matched; most are two-syllable words, and, as one might expect (given the small Hawaiian alphabet), there is a high concentration of matched phonemes.⁶

This approach is a radical departure from western scientific norms of species classification by size and complexity. But in Hawaiian, classification by size is rendered almost irrelevant. Besides emphasizing the difference in cultural perspective and worldview, this example also demonstrates the importance of Hawaiian language to Hawaiian poetry, and particularly how language and orality influence form. Classification by rhyme scheme and the similarity of sounds between the words *i'a* and *nai'a* works in Hawaiian, while in English, the words *fish* and *dolphin* are completely incongruous to the ear. The oral tradition formed this type of classification, as it functions as a mnemonic device, enabling the memorization of lengthy and complex information with relative ease.

Other formulaic “rules” structure traditional Hawaiian poetry. Opposites or complementary elements are often paired, demonstrating the Hawaiian penchant for *pono*. Some of the more common examples are:

akua / kanaka	god / man
i kai / i uka ⁷	ocean / land
lā‘au / i‘a ⁸	plant / animal
kāne / wahine	male / female
lī / lā ⁹	narrow / broad
pō / ao	darkness / light
nuku / wai ¹⁰	earth / water

Most of these pairings are found in the repeated stanzaic refrains following the helu hānau (birthing lists) in the first four wā of the Kumulipo, of which the following is an example:

	‘O kāne ia Wai‘ololī,	Man for the narrow stream,
	‘o ka wahine o Wai‘ololā	woman for the broad stream
185	Hānau ka He‘e noho i kai	Born is the <i>Octopus</i> living in the sea
	Kia‘i ‘ia e ka <i>Walahe‘e</i> noho i uka	Guarded by the <i>Walahe‘e shrub</i> living on land
	He pō uhe‘e i ka wāwā	Darkness slips into light
	He nuku, he kai ka ‘ai a ka i‘a	Earth and ocean are the food of fish
	‘O ke Akua ke komo, ‘a‘oe komo kanaka	God(s) enters, man cannot enter
190	‘O kāne ia Wai‘ololī,	Man for the narrow stream,
	‘o ka wahine o Wai‘ololā	woman for the broad stream
	Hānau ka ‘O‘opukai noho i kai	Born is the <i>Gobey fish</i> living in the sea
	Kia‘i ‘ia e ka ‘O‘opuwai noho i uka	Guarded by the <i>Gobey fish</i> living on land
	He pō uhe‘e i ka wāwā	Darkness slips into light
	He nuku, he kai ka ‘ai a ka i‘a	Earth and ocean are the food of fish
195	‘O ke Akua ke komo, ‘a‘oe komo kanaka	God(s) enters, man cannot enter

The first line, “‘O kāne ia Wai‘ololī, ‘o ka wahine o Wai‘ololā,” pairs male and female, and narrow and broad waters. The pairing of male and female indicates procreation, especially when associated with the element of water, suggesting, on the human and animal level, bodily fluids such as sperm and amniotic fluid. The “narrow waters” and “broad waters” are metaphorically couched and somewhat cryptic, even to scholars knowledgeable of the Kumulipo; it has been suggested that they may also refer to freshwater streams and the ocean. This would add another layer of meanings to those already evident. The next two lines are linked to the

others in several ways. First, one is placed “i kai,” in the sea, while the other is placed “i uka,” on land. In the two paukū (stanzas) above, one features a pairing of animal and plant, while the other pairs two animals. The types of pairings vary from paukū to paukū, again emphasizing the rhythmic coupling of the main nouns, rather than a scientific correlation. The remaining lines, the same in each paukū, pair night and day (“Darkness slips into light”); earth and ocean (both “the food of fish”); and god(s) and humans.

Concerned with the establishment of living creatures on the earth, the entire first half of the Kumulipo follows this formula with few variants. For example, the first wā states, “He nuku, he wai ka ‘ai a ka lā‘au” (Earth and freshwater are the food of plants), while the third wā says, “He hua, he i‘o ka ‘ai a ka manu” (Fruit and protein are the food of birds) (Beckwith 1972, 188, 196; my translation). The fourth wā concludes, “He nuku, he la‘i ka ‘ai a kolo” (Earth and foliage are the food of the creepers) (Beckwith 1972, 198; my translation).

Repetitive Structures in Other Traditional Hawaiian Poetry

The dualistic pairing featured in older traditional Hawaiian poetry continues to be an important feature of Hawaiian poetry today, as demonstrated in Pukui’s “E ‘Ike Mai” (Behold) (my translation; italics added):

I <i>luna</i> lā, i <i>luna</i>	Above, above,
Nā manu o ka lewa	the birds in the sky
I <i>lalo</i> lā, i <i>lalo</i>	Below, below,
Nā pua o ka honua	the flowers on the land
I <i>uka</i> lā, i <i>uka</i>	In the mountains, mountains,
Nā ulu lā‘au	the forests
I <i>kai</i> lā, i <i>kai</i>	In the sea, the sea,
Nā i‘a o ka moana	the fish of the ocean
Ha‘ina mai ka puana	Tell the refrain
A he nani ke ao nei	Of the beautiful world.

Alfons Korn described this poem as “traditional in theme and structure” through the pairing of the words *luna/lalo* (above/below) and *uka/kai* (mountain/ocean) (Pukui and Korn 1976, 192). Additionally, linked pairings such as *manu/pua* (birds/flowers), *lewa/honua* (sky/earth), and *ulu lā‘au/i‘a* (forest/fish) evoke images reminiscent of the Kumulipo.

It is not surprising that such an important concept as pono has made its way into contemporary Hawaiian compositions in English. One exam-

ple is John Cruz’s song, “Island Style” (1996). This central refrain of this mele states, “Oh yes, we do it island style, from the *mountains* to the *ocean*, from the *windward* to the *leeward* side” (italics added). As in the example from the Kumulipo, land (here symbolized by the mountains), *i uka*, and ocean, *i kai*, are a familiar pairing. Likewise, Cruz uses the common dualism of windward (ko‘olau) and leeward (kona).

There are numerous examples of this type of order, structure, and formula, where the first line or two of a stanza is repeated throughout the poem, suggesting a refrain. One such mele is “Ka Wai a Kāne” (The Water of Kāne). At first glance this mele may appear evenly divided into six stanzas, yet the stanzas are unequal in the number of lines they contain (five to seven). Each begins with a question: “He ui, he nīnau/E ui aku ana au iā ‘oe/Aia i hea ka wai a Kāne?” (A query, a question, I put to you:/ Where is the water of Kāne?). The remainder of each stanza puts forth an answer to the question, in literal and metaphoric terms: where the sun rises, where the sun sets, from the highest mountain ridges to the deepest valleys and everywhere in between—there is the water of Kāne (Emerson 1997 [1909], 257–259).

As a whole, the balanced images in this poem (which Emerson described as a poetic allegory referencing the hydrological cycle) echo the Kumulipo in presenting traditional pairings of east and west (sunrise/sunset), mountains and valleys (*i luna/i lalo*), land and sea (*mauka/makai*), and fresh and salt water (*wai/kai*). Here the question-answer structure of the mele and the pairing of images both work as mnemonic devices, allowing the performer to recall the pane (answers) to the posed ui (questions) with relative ease.

This formula is seen in a number of later mele Hawai‘i, such as the mele nema (chant of resentment) from Ka‘ū, Hawai‘i, which begins each stanza with the question, “Hū, hū! No wai ka pilau?” (Hm! Whose stinking odor is it?). The rest of the stanza provides different answers to the question, each ridiculing and mocking a different, named person, until the end, when the question is answered, “No Naheana a Haupū ka pilau/‘Ae, nona i‘o ka pilau i lohe ‘ia” (The stinking odor belongs to Naheana, wife of Haupū/ Yes, the stinking odor is indeed hers, for I have heard it to be so) (Pukui 1949, 249).

Another type of formulaic line is the “sign off” or concluding line. Traditionally, the phrase “He inoa no ____” (In the name of [one being honored]) signified the composition was a mele inoa, a name chant written to honor a specific individual, human or godly. Among a multitude of exam-

ples of this poetic structure, an ancient one is “A ka luna o Pu‘u‘oni‘oni” (Above at Pu‘u‘oni‘oni or Trembling Hill), transcribed by Nona Beamer (2001, 39; italics added):

A ka luna o Pu‘u‘oni‘oni	High above at Pu‘u‘oni‘oni
Ke anaina a ka <i>wahine</i>	The goddesses attending Pele have assembled
<i>Ki‘ei</i> kaiāulu o Wahinekapu	The community of Wahinekapu peering
Noho ana ‘o <i>Papalauahi</i>	Beyond it lies Papalauahi
<i>Lauahi</i> Pele i kai o Puna	The fires of Pele consume the coast of Puna
One ‘ā kai o <i>Malama</i>	Creating cinder heaps at Malama
<i>Mālama</i> i ke kanaka	Take care of your people
A he pua laha ‘ole	For they are the rarest of flowers

Typically accompanied by choreography and chanted by the dancer, the concluding line of the above mele, “He inoa no Hi‘iakaikapoliopole” is recited, not chanted. This tag line reveals who the chant is honoring, and also signals the audience that the performance has concluded.

Another structural element of traditional Hawaiian poetry contained in this mele, highly valued because of its difficulty to achieve, is the direct or implied linking of the last word of the end line of one couplet with the first word of the first line of the following couplet. In the first three couplets, the words *wahi/ne* and *ki/‘ei* are slant rhymes, while *Papalauahi/Lauahi* and *Malama/Mālama* are direct rhymes.

This technique is also demonstrated in the mele “Nā Hala o Naue” (The Pandanus Groves of Naue, [Kaua‘i]), which was composed by J Kahinu for Queen Emma in 1863, a year after both her son, Prince Albert, and her husband, King Alexander Liholiho Kamehameha IV, passed away (Elbert and Mahoe 1970, 80–81). Of the ten couplets that make up the mele, the second through seventh most strongly demonstrate this type of linking (italics added; my translation):

Ke ‘oni a‘ela, ‘eā, ‘eā,	Moving there
Pili mai <i>Hā‘ena</i> , ‘eā, ‘eā	close to Hā‘ena.
‘ <i>Ena</i> aku nā maka, ‘eā, ‘eā,	The fiery eyes,
‘O nā manu i ka pua, ‘eā, ‘eā,	The birds upon the flowers.
A ‘ike i ka lehua, ‘eā, ‘eā,	See the lehua
Miki‘ala i <i>laila</i> , ‘eā, ‘eā.	Alert there.

<i>I laila</i> nō au, ‘eā, ‘eā, Me ka mana‘o pū, ‘eā, ‘eā.	There I truly am In thought.
Nani wale ka nahele, ‘eā, ‘eā, I puia ‘ala, ‘eā, ‘eā.	The forest is beautiful Drenched with sweet fragrance.
<i>Ke ‘ala</i> laua‘e, ‘eā, ‘eā, ‘O ka pua mokihana, ‘eā, ‘eā.	The fragrance of laua‘e ferns And mokihana berries.

This mele also includes a standard refrain or tag line, ‘eā, ‘eā. Other tag lines, such as *e*, *lā* (or a combination, such as *e a lā*), *tewe tewe*, *tomi tomi* are also used as rhythm markers. Like the other formulaic line structures, all are repetitive; as Elbert noted, in traditional Hawaiian poetry. “Repetition, not rhyme or exact meter, [was and] is a favorite poetic device” (1962, 390).

The phrase *ha‘ina ‘ia mai ana ka puana* or a similar variant is commonly placed as the first line of the concluding paukū of a mele, typically a mele ku‘i. Mele ku‘i written with four-line paukū or two-line couplets are most usual; on average, each mele consists of four to eight paukū. The phrase can be translated in several ways, such as “thus ends my song/story,” or “tell the praises of (subject)” (Stillman 1989, 20). It is clearly seen in this example from “Nani Hanalei” (Beautiful Hanalei), a mele pana (mele celebrating a place) composed in the 1940s by Kai Davis (2003; translation by Larry Kimura; italics added):

<i>No Hanalei i ku‘u aloha</i>	Hanalei is my beloved
Ka nani a‘o Hanalei	The beauty of Hanalei
Ho‘ohihi ‘ana ‘oe i ku‘u aloha lā ē	How I admire the love you give
Hanalei no i ka ‘oi	Hanalei is the best
<i>Ha‘ina mai ka puana</i>	The story is told
Ka nani a‘o Hanalei	Of the beauty of Hanalei
Ho‘ohihi ‘ana ‘oe e ku‘u aloha lā ē	How I admire the love you give
Hanalei no i ka ‘oi	Hanalei is the best.

“Nani Hanalei” demonstrates a typical four-line stanza, in which the first line of the opening stanza is replaced with “Ha‘ina mai ka puana” in the concluding stanza. Otherwise, the lines of the concluding stanza are the same as the opening one.

A second example, “Aloha ka Manini” (Greetings/Love to the Manini Fish) is a mele aloha (mele expressing love) composed by Lot Kauwe in celebration of this small, brightly striped reef herbivore, often caught and

eaten by Hawaiians (2003; translation by Kaʻiulani McGuire; italics added):

<i>Aloha ka Manini me ka Popolo</i>	Hail to the Manini and Popolo fish
<i>Ka iʻa noho ʻia i ka lau papa</i>	Fish that live on the reef
<i>Haʻina ʻia mai ana ka puana</i>	Tell the praises again
<i>Aloha ka Manini me ka Popolo</i>	Hail to the Manini and Popolo fish.

In Kauwe’s typical two-line couplet, because of the constraints of the form, instead of reiterating the first couplet, the haʻina phrase is followed simply by the opening line, which also functions as the title of the mele.

The forms demonstrated by these two mele are oft repeated in many genres of Hawaiian mele. The haʻina phrase works both as a summary and recap, recalling for the performer and audience the subject of the mele; the sign off, “he inoa no __,” similarly focuses on the subject, while signaling the conclusion of the mele/performance. In other poetic traditions, such repetition might be viewed as extraneous, tedious, or boring, and thus undesirable; but it was highly valued and important in the oral tradition.

One final, noteworthy example of repetitive structure in traditional Hawaiian poetry is the relation of series of mele to each other. A wonderful example of this comes from the epic of the Hawaiian volcano goddess Pele and her beloved younger sister, Hiʻiakaikapoliopole. Most of the great body of literature surrounding Pele is contained in poetic rather than prose form. The most famous moʻolelo (story) surrounds Pele’s love for the mortal Kauaʻi chief Lohiʻau. In this moʻolelo, Pele sends her youngest sister Hiʻiakaikapoliopole on a dangerous mission to fetch Lohiʻau and bring him to her volcanic crater home on the island of Hawaiʻi. Several parts of the moʻolelo feature a series of chants that all begin with the same opening line, with the rest of the stanza making a different statement or request. The first part is often referred to as Hiʻiaka’s kau (prayer) chants, which begin with the line, “Ke kū nei au e hele” (I am standing here ready to depart), as she asks Pele to supply her with a traveling partner for her long journey.

Another series of related and formulaic chants concerns Hiʻiaka’s crossing of a wooden bridge spanning the Wailuku river in Hilo, en route from the volcano to Kauaʻi. Two ancestor moʻo (lizard) gods are guarding the bridge, demanding a toll from all who pass; payment for safe passage con-

sists of sundry items. Because Hi‘iaka does not have anything to give to the mo‘o guardians, she seeks their mercy and understanding by calling out to them, asking for the typical items they request. The series of chants are nearly identical, with the exception of the item being requested:

Kahulihuli ē!	Rickety, shaky
Ka papa o Wailuku,	The bridge at Wailuku
Kahuli ‘o ‘Āpua,	‘Āpua is overturned
Ha‘a mai ‘o Maukele,	Maukele is brought down
He ‘ole Kekaha,	Don’t cheat us
Kū‘ai ‘ai ē,	The price is <i>vegetables</i>
Hōmai ka ‘ai,	Grant us <i>vegetables</i>
Hōmai ho‘i ka ‘ai ē,	Grant us <i>vegetables</i> indeed
I ‘aina aku ho‘i ē.	And we will indeed <i>eat</i> .

(“He Mo‘olelo no Hi‘iakaikapoliopole,” Kapihenui 1862;
my translation; italics added.)

The only difference between this mele and the five mele that follow it in the course of the text is the substitution of the item being requested. The italicized segments above are subsequently replaced with i‘a (fish), pa‘akai (salt), kō (sugar), kapa (cloth), and wai (drinking water), with the last line altered to fit the change in request for cloth (“I ‘a‘ahu‘ia aku ho‘i ē” [So that we will be clothed (in kapa)]) and water (“I inu ‘ia aku ho‘i ē” [So that we will drink]).

This structural linking of Hawaiian mele is tied to repetition in oral tradition as well as performance. It would be easy to suggest that it is a form of “call and response,” yet it is not. Rather, the use of formulaic lines linked together serially is another way Hawaiians privileged repetition and shaped their storytelling structures through performance. These poetic forms comprise the bulk of the Pele epic; even when transformed into a written form in the nineteenth century, the earliest version of the story consists of a linking of over three hundred chants, some over a hundred lines long, with a paragraph or less of prose. This demonstrates the link to performance through song and dance; it also suggests another lei analogy: The intertwining of poetry and prose in the Pele epic is a lei ku‘i, a strung lei, in which the chant poems are the blossoms, and the sparse prose lines are the string on which the blossoms are strung, providing the beautiful lei shape.

This repetitive structure is common in contemporary Hawaiian poetry

as well; one example is Haunani-Kay Trask's "Chant of Lamentation" (1994, 23–24; italics in original):

I lament the abandoned
terraces, their shattered
waters, silent ears
of stone and light
 who comes trailing
 winds through
 taro lo'i?

I lament the wounded
skies, unnourished
desolate, fallen drunk
over the iron sea
 who chants
 the hollow *ipu*
 into the night?

I lament the black
and naked past, a million ghosts
laid out across the ocean floor
 who journeys from
 the rising to the setting
 of the sun?

I lament the flowers
'a'ole pua, without
issue on the stained
and dying earth
 who parts the trembling
 legs, enters where
 the god enters, not
 as a man but as a god?

I lament my own
long, furious lamentation
flung down
into the bitter stomachs
into the blood-filled streams
into the far
and scattered graves
 who tells of those
 disinterred, their
 ground-up bones, their
 poisoned eyes?

The refrain “I lament . . .” is featured in every other stanza, each one recounting a different loss suffered by Kānaka Maoli in the onslaught of colonization. The intermediate stanzas imply a second voice—reflecting a communal stance, with two separate but related voices woven together into one poem. Trask’s poem references the past through allusions to traditional practices of taro farming (abandoned terraces and shattered waters, stones and [sun]light). Line 195 of the Kumulipo, “‘O ke Akua ke komo, ‘a‘oe komo kanaka” (God[s] enters, man cannot enter), which is repeated throughout the first four epochs represented in that chant, is evoked in Trask’s poem through the lines, “the god enters/not as a man but as a god.”

Although not following the traditional structure of a kanikau (a dirge composed for a deceased individual), Trask has acknowledged the traditional genre by titling this work a “lamentation,” while also twisting it into a contemporary form: Here the grief is for the greater loss of the nation and the mass suffering Kānaka Maoli have endured under oppression.

A similar technique is utilized in Puanani Burgess’s poem, “Hawai‘i Pono‘ī” (1998, 173–176). Interspersed between sections of this lengthy narrative poem (describing the fieldtrip of a class of young Hawaiian students from the rural Wai‘anae coast to ‘Iolani Palace) are the refrains, “La‘amea ‘Ū” and “Lili‘uokalani ‘Ū.”

Through the polished koa wood doors, with elegantly etched
glass windows,
Docent Doris ushers us into another Time.
Over the carefully polished floors we glide, through the
darkened hallways: spinning, sniffing, turning,
fingers reaching to touch something sacred, something
forbidden—quickly.

Then into the formal dining room, silent now.
Table set: the finest French crystal gleaming; spoons,
knives, forks, laid with precision next to gold-rimmed
plates with the emblem of the King.

Silent now.

La‘amea ‘Ū.

La‘amea is part of King David La‘amea Kalākaua’s name, and Lili‘uokalani was his sister; they were the last sovereigns of the Hawaiian nation. On one level, the word ‘ū (to grunt, groan, moan, sigh, mourn, grieve)

recalls the tradition genre of *kanikau*; on another, it represents the communal grieving of *Kānaka Maoli* for all that has been lost to us due to western colonization. Burgess's poem evokes the spiritual connection to ancestors as well as continued Hawaiian resistance to colonial oppression in the concluding lines of the poem, which describe her experience in Lili'uokalani's upstairs corner bedroom of the palace, the small room in which she was imprisoned for eight months after the overthrow of her kingdom:

I was in that room. Her room. In which she lived and
died and composed songs for her people. It was
the room in which she composed prayers to a
deaf people:

"Oh honest Americans, hear me for my downtrodden
people . . ."

She stood with me at her window;
Looking out on the world, that she would never rule again;
Looking out on the world that she would only remember
in the scent of flowers;
Looking out on a world that once despised her.

And in my left ear, she whispered:
'E Pua. Remember:

This is not America.
And we are not Americans.

Hawai'i Pono'ī.

The title of the poem, "*Hawai'i Pono'ī*," is a direct reference to the national anthem of the Hawaiian kingdom during *Kalākaua's* reign, today the state song of *Hawai'i*. It translates to "*Hawai'i's Own*," referring to *Kānaka Maoli*, *Hawai'i's* native population. Yet it also alludes to the text of the anthem, which begins, "*Hawai'i pono'ī, nānā i kou Mō'ī/Ka lani ali'i, ke ali'i*" (*Hawai'i's own, look to your King/The royal chief, the chief*), directing *Kānaka Maoli* to look to Hawaiian leadership and Hawaiian traditions, including Hawaiian cosmology, in which the *ali'i* were the children of gods and were themselves viewed as the gods who walked the earth (*Kame'elehiwa* 1992, 26). The chorus of the anthem states, "*Makua lani ē, Kamehameha ē/Nā kāua e pale/Me ka ihe*" (*Royal father/Kamehameha/We shall defend/with spears*) (*Elbert and Mahoe*

1970, 44). As a national anthem in the mid-1800s, “Hawai‘i Pono‘ī” was a rousing, patriotic song; Burgess’s twentieth-century poem is also nationalistic in tone, turning a sorrow-filled history of loss into determined patriotism for continued resistance.

FROM LEI KU‘I TO MELE KU‘I: TRANSITIONAL POEMS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The nineteenth century witnessed great change in Hawaiian society, not all of it good. Some changes were so devastating that Kānaka Maoli have still not recovered. In 1820, the development of a Hawaiian alphabet facilitated the transition from a strictly oral to a literate society. By 1831 the first mission press was established, and by 1860 the first independent presses were in operation.¹¹ Throughout this period, Hawaiians were prolific readers and writers, converting ancient chants and stories to writing and also translating and publishing literature from abroad.¹² Adept at the new “technology” of writing, Kānaka Maoli used it to archive their history and cultural traditions and extend their artistic expression. Today, the number of mele in privately held manuscripts as well as in published newspapers and books is astounding; the newspapers alone contain thousands of pages of written text, a great many of which contain mele.

At the same time, in the generations since first contact with the West, the texture and shape of Hawaiian poetry did not go untouched by outside influences. Hawaiian literature flourished from the 1860s to the 1920s. During this period of the independent newspapers, a number of different genres of poetry—but not all—were published. As Nogelmeier has noted, “The print media became a repository, but it was selective, and newspapers did not usually include all of the many forms of chants that existed. Ancient mele were solicited by many newspapers, but some chants, and hula chants in general, were considered inappropriate for a discerning audience. Letters of complaint were quickly received by editors who published anything that offended those with a strict mission morality. More likely to be published were chant forms like *kanikau* (dirges), *mele pai ali‘i* (honorific chants for chiefs), and *mele aloha ‘āina* (place or loyalty chants)” (2001, 2).

One change was a shift in structure to one more reminiscent of western, closed forms, such as the mele *ku‘i*. The word *ku‘i*, to “join, stitch, or bind,” wove together two strands of poetry, combining “old and new

poetry,” or “old idioms in new formats” (Stillman 2002). In her groundbreaking and continuing work on hula ku‘i, Stillman has identified certain criteria for mele ku‘i that set it apart from the older, traditional mele ‘āla‘apapa:

1. Mele ku‘i are strophic, meaning there is one melody for all verses.
2. The last verse always forms some sort of conclusion and is thus formulaic and predictable.
3. Unlike the mele ‘āla‘apapa, where the poetry always takes precedence above form, in mele ku‘i, there is a predictable pattern that supersedes the poetry. (Stillman 2002)

By the 1870s, mass immigration of Asians, who were brought here to work on the newly established sugar plantations, also impacted Hawaiian culture and language. Around this time, the Hawaiian interest in the English language was misinterpreted by haole as a lack of commitment to their own, resulting in the demise of Hawaiian language medium schools (Kimura 1985). By this time other elements of cultural expression (most notably the hula), branded “lewd and lascivious” by the prudish Calvinist missionaries, had been publicly banned. As the century progressed, attacks against Hawaiians at all levels increased. By 1893, the situation had deteriorated to the point where Hawaiians were dispossessed of land and government in the overthrow of Queen Lili‘uokalani by United States-backed haole forces.¹³

The impact of these political events is clearly seen in the subject matter of mele composed during the period, most notably in mele kū‘ē, songs protesting the loss of the kingdom and subsequent annexation to the United States. The most famous composition of this period is “Kaulana Nā Pua,” alternately known as “Mele ‘Ai Pōhaku” (Rock Eating Song; see Stillman 1999). A number of buke mele lāhui (Hawaiian national songbooks) began to appear, as well as a slew of mele aloha ‘āina (patriotic songs) published in the various newspapers (see Stillman 1989). Themes of nationalism, Hawaiian patriotism, resistance to haole domination, and other forms of aloha ‘āina have continued as strong themes in Hawaiian poetry until today.

Other cultural changes soon followed on the heels of the political upheaval. The large influx of foreigners—mostly Asians but also Europeans and Pacific Islanders brought in to work the sugar plantations—eroded the Hawaiian language and art forms even further. Immigrant

languages blended with Hawaiian and English to become Hawai‘i Creole English. By 1920, this “Pidgin” became the dominant language in Hawai‘i,¹⁴ complicating matters for the haole elite, who looked down on it as “mongrel,” working-class talk. They did what they could to distance themselves from it, going as far as establishing separate schools for their own children. The tension between Hawai‘i Creole English and so-called “standard” English is ongoing, although in the past few decades, it has taken a twist: seen as a form of resistance to haole dominance, as well as a fierce expression of “local” identity, Hawai‘i Creole English has become one of the important markers of Hawai‘i-based literature, taken up by Hawaiian and other writers in the contemporary period as an important aspect of self-expression and identity in their craft.

FALLING INTO FREE VERSE: THE CONTEMPORARY HAWAIIAN CONTEXT

The majority of contemporary Hawaiian poetry could be categorized as free verse. Unlike some Hawaiian poets of the nineteenth century who were beginning to adapt and adopt western forms of poetry, Hawaiian writers today engage in little experimentation with western closed forms of poetry. There are probably as many individual reasons for this as there are poets. But like Hawaiian poets of earlier generations, contemporary Hawaiian poets have been more interested in the metaphors, images, and kaona of the poetry they create than in the form it takes. To use the lei metaphor in another way, it is the aesthetics of the lei (metaphors, images) that is valued, not the pū‘olo (package) it is delivered in.¹⁵ An additional factor could be related to the turbulent political history Hawaiians have endured, a topic addressed by contemporary Hawaiian poets. In other words, it is conceivable that contemporary Hawaiian poets resist western forms as some have resisted English—because of its association with haole hegemony and oppressive colonialism. On the other hand, Hawaiians have adapted some elements of western society and made them our own; one example is the lei papa (flat lei). Created to adorn the brimmed hats of the early paniolo (cowboys), these lei are still worn and cherished today.

There are so many examples of free verse Hawaiian poetry it is too difficult to highlight only one or two. Therefore, I will concentrate on the different ways contemporary Hawaiian poetry has, like the lei papa,

adapted itself to selected western forms of poetry, while at the same time retaining elements of tradition.

Puana ka Leo: Poetry in Performance

Poets have been called “athletes of the mind,” whose “performances take place in books” (Holden 1999, xi). If that is the case, then performance poets are athletes of the tongue, whose performances take place on stage. The popularity of “spoken-word” poetry among contemporary Kanaka Maoli poets can be traced to three factors: the already established genealogy of performance poetry from our cultural past, particularly as it relates to hula; the popularity of spoken-word poetry (including hip-hop) in the continental United States; and the difficulties new writers typically experience in getting published.

Kanaka Maoli performance poetry has been carried from the ancient past to the postmodern present by chanters, singers, dancers, and musicians. In each successive period, different genres of mele have adapted to new influences, from the Victorian waltzes of the nineteenth century to rap and hip-hop today (see Stillman 1998; Ho‘omanawanui 2001). Kanaka Maoli poets who have adapted western performance and spoken-word poetry to a Hawaiian context typically combine rap, hip-hop, and other beats with Hawaiian chanting (Katana, in Cataluna 2002). Poets like ‘Īmaikalani Kalāhele, Joe Balaz, and Lisa Linn Kanae are successfully published poets who are now venturing into performing spoken-word poetry. Others, like Katana, Makepa Hāwea, Lopaka Kapanui, and Kealoha, are performance poets.

Access to publication is one reason that Kanaka Maoli poets, especially young poets, have turned to spoken-word poetry. With technology today, it is easier to record homemade spoken-word CDs than to find a publisher, and less expensive to distribute them at local performance venues than to rely on a publisher to market a collection of poetry. As younger generations grow up with multimedia formats, audience preference for these formats also makes spoken word more artistically appealing, even for established poets such as Joe Balaz. Balaz’s first CD recording of “amplified poetry,” *Electric Laulau*, is also the first commercially produced CD of Kanaka Maoli spoken-word poetry (1998). This collection features Balaz performing one or two poems he has previously published, such as “Spear Fisher.” What makes Balaz’s CD so important is that he is noted for his use of Hawai‘i Creole English, and for those not familiar

with the pronunciation and nuances of the language, his recording can give listeners a better feel for it than if they were to read the words on a page. The subtle humor employed in pieces such as the poem “Gottah Eat ‘Um” is also more clearly grasped by listening to Balaz perform this piece than by reading it:

When I was one small kid,
 my faddah told me—
 “Anyting you kill you gottah eat.
 You shoot da dove wit da B.B. gun,
 you gottah eat ‘um.
 You spear da small manini at da beach
 you gottah eat ‘um . . .
 Whoa brah! Tinking back to small kid time
 An da small kid games I used to play,
 aftah I heard dat, no moa I kill flies
 wit one rubbah band.

Like traditional Hawaiian poetry, this work incorporates repetition through the line, “you gotta eat ‘um.” Connection to nature and food are evoked, as well as a strong sense of *mālama ‘āina* through the images of hunting and fishing. The father’s words serve as a warning not to kill indiscriminately. It also conveys the message of taking care of the natural resources of the land—causing the narrator to reflect in a humorous manner on his killing of flies. The poem climaxes with the simultaneously funny and gross image of having to eat what one kills—in this case, flies, a definitely unpalatable image.

Katana doesn’t classify herself as a Hawaiian poet, yet her work reflects a strong sense of Hawaiian identity (Tonouchi 2001). Hawaiian chant and rap rhythms are interwoven in the following example of her poetry, “Hawaiians Look to Your Cozmogany” (2001; ellipses in original; italics added):

Lono, Kāne, Kanaloa, Kū—All Hawaiians stand togethah for we still
 have much to do.
 Lono, Kāne, Kanaloa, Kū—Hawaiians stand tall,
 look to your roots. . . .

Proud to be Hawaiian, to be born on my native land, Ka ha‘aheo o ko‘u hui,
 pride of my Hawaiian clan. Never cared for school, they taught da white man’s
 history, ignored my culture’s genocide, to me that was a mystery, I reject da

ha'ole ways not based on brown/white dermatology, see da white man's wayz
back in da dayz denied my ancestors of their cozmogany. . . .

(chanter) *'O ke au i ka huli wela ka honua . . .*

They took our way of life, our self expression, our hula . . .

(chanter) *'O ke au i ka huli lole ka lani . . .*

Da kanaka maoli never chose da white democracy . . .

(chanter) *'O ke au i kū ka'i aka ka lā . . .*

Hawaiians keep your head high, our race will never fall . . .

(chanter) *E ho'omālamalama i ka malama . . .*

We got to come together, ignore all negative drama . . .

Lono, Kāne, Kanaloa, Kū—Hawaiians stand togethah for we still have
much to do.

Lono, Kāne, Kanaloa, Kū—Hawaiians be proud,
look to your roots.

(chanter) *'O ka lipo o ka lā, 'o ka lipo o ka pō . . .*

Darkness of day, darkness of night, let's step out of da dark nā po'e fight for
your rights. To stand together must be da ultimate goal, we all come from kalo,
so says da Kumulipo. and don't tell me that my people should settle, we're not
puppets like Pinocchio, the state is not Giapetto, we deserve our land, take us
out of da ghettos.

We've got to stay strong, see da reverse psychology, Hawaiians find yo MANA
in the words of your cozmogany. . . .

Most of the poem is rapped in Hawai'i Creole English, intertwined with
Hawaiian lyrics that are chanted (italicized above). The chanted lines are
taken straight from the opening wā of the Kumulipo. Besides directly
incorporating the ancient cosmological chant, Katana's poem makes spe-
cific reference to the importance of the chant in the lines challenging mod-
ern Kānaka Maoli to "look to your roots" as "we all come from kalo, so
says da Kumulipo."¹⁶ The four middle couplets, which pair one line from
the Kumulipo in Hawaiian with one line of commentary in English, are
working on the level of call and response, as the English lines are not
translations of the Hawaiian ones.

The lines also work on the level of irony, as they slyly drive home how
Kānaka Maoli have been cut off from our language by *not* translating,
stating right after the opening line of the Kumulipo (*'O ke au i ka huli wela*

ka honua): “They took our way of life, our self expression, our hula.” The reference here to loss of self-expression and hula speaks directly to the issue of poetry and poetic expression, as hula is a dance form whose precise choreography is dependent on the poetic texts—hula can’t be hula without words. The lack of translation of this line leaves the Hawaiian text closed to those who aren’t conversant with the language; due to the oppressive colonization that stripped our ancestors of our language, few Kānaka Maoli today even recognize these words as the opening line of the great Hawaiian cosmological chant of origin. The point is reinforced with the next line, “Da kanaka maoli never chose da white democracy,” referring to our history of forced annexation, and the US ideology of assimilation, which has historically meant an almost rabid insistence on the part of some Americans for a monolingual, English-speaking society.

The repetition of the names of the four most important male gods—Lono, Kāne, Kanaloa, and Kū—not only reflects Hawaiian poetic values but also works as an invocation to them; calling on the Hawaiian akua (gods) and looking to a Native rather than a western cosmology is another way of articulating in contemporary Hawaiian poetry the message of resistance to haole ways.

The Adoption of Western Form: Concrete Poetry and Visual Images

It is impossible for Kānaka Maoli today to ignore the western influences that pervade Hawai‘i’s education systems, both public and private, which have privileged English-language education and British-American literary aesthetics since Hawai‘i’s annexation to the United States in 1898. Yet even contemporary Hawaiian poets who utilize western forms have kept metaphors, images, and kaona grounded in Hawaiian tradition. One Kanaka Maoli poet who has successfully merged Hawaiian thought with western form is Wayne Kaumuali‘i Westlake. While Westlake has composed in many different genres of poetry, some of his best works (which demonstrate the intertwining of the two) are his “concrete poems”: “Hawaiians Eat Fish” and “Pupule” (1989a; 1989b).

“Hawaiians Eat Fish” repeats these three words several times (figure 1). The word *eat* is consistently placed between the words *Hawaiians* and *fish*, with the poem concluding with the word *Hawaiians* one final time. Instead of being written out in phrases, the words are “stacked,” one word per line. Thus, as typical of concrete poetry, the word was used as an image, to stunning effect:

HAWAIIANS

EAT
FISH

EAT

HAWAIIANS

EAT
FISH

EAT

HAWAIIANS

EAT
FISH

EAT

HAWAIIANS



FIGURE 1

Westlake has described concrete poetry as “What you see is what is meant. / Nothing more, nothing less. / Take it or leave it” (Westlake 1979, 33). Yet his concrete poem, “Hawaiians Eat Fish,” can be interpreted on several levels, indicative of the Hawaiian penchant for kaona. Viewed one way, it is a statement of fact: Fish and other ocean creatures were the most important protein source for Kānaka Maoli; as island people surrounded by the abundance of the Pacific ocean, the kai (sea) is often fondly referred to as the “Hawaiian ice box.” The importance of fish is reflected in our poetry from ancient times to now: Fish are prominently featured in the Kumulipo, the first species of animal to appear. This is significant, due to the genealogical hierarchy favored among Polynesians, with the firstborn being more esteemed than later offspring. Fish are important metaphors in our literature, from the aggressive manō (shark), to which bold and daring chiefs were equated, to the sweet-eyed kole and halalū, to which beautiful and desired young women were compared by their sweethearts.¹⁷ The celebration of the eating of fish is reflected in the number and variety of mo‘olelo and mele written about fish, such as the earlier example, “Aloha ka Manini.”¹⁸

Westlake’s poem can also be read as a command for Hawaiians to eat fish. This is an important political statement in contemporary Hawai‘i, a way to hold on to cultural traditions being quickly eroded by American pop culture and a continental perspective (as well as to fight against the poor health conditions that plague our native population). Westlake is telling Hawaiians to resist American cultural influences and big business, represented perhaps by the beef industry, which has blitzed the media with the message that beef is “what’s for dinner.”

But another layer of kaona, which also touches older Hawaiian traditions, is the flip side of the repeated message for Hawaiians to eat fish (“Hawaiians Eat Fish”), that is, “Fish Eat Hawaiians.” On the surface, one might think Westlake is referring to a “Jaws”-like image of Hawaiians being attacked by sharks, which is unlikely, as sharks are considered sacred, beloved ‘aumakua (ancestral spirit, family guardian).¹⁹ Rather, Westlake is probably referring to an older wānana (prophecy), written about in the nineteenth century by Moke Manu, David Malo, and others, which warns that the “small fish will be eaten by the big fish.” Metaphorically, this ‘ōlelo no‘eau (proverb) has been interpreted to mean that Hawai‘i (the small fish) would be overtaken and oppressed (eaten) by foreigners (big fish).

Another way this concrete poem touches traditional Hawaiian form is

in the repetition of the phrases, which hearken back to oral tradition. Westlake's poem successfully interweaves these strands of thought, evoking images and proverbs from the past with the oppressive political situation of the present in a way that can be interpreted as a call to Hawaiians to resist colonialism and oppression, and to continue to hold onto and fight for our traditions through the deceptively simple—yet highly symbolic—act of eating fish.²⁰

The concrete poem "Pupule" is a whimsical and clever visualization of the definition of the Hawaiian word *pupule*, "crazy, insane, reckless, wild" (Westlake 1989b). In this poem, the letters *p*, *u*, *l*, and *e*, used in spelling the word, are jumbled across the page in a haphazard, disorganized way,

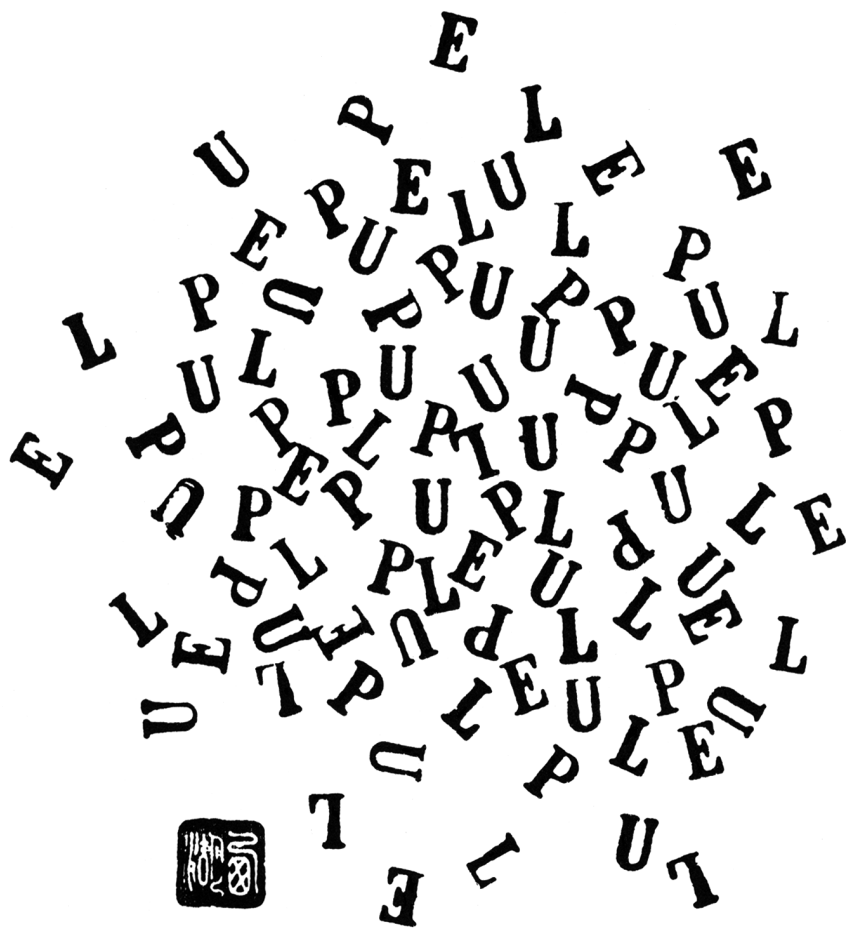


FIGURE 2

indicating a sense of recklessness or craziness (figure 2). The placement of the letters can be read as a political statement about the psyche of the modern Hawaiian, caught in the conflict between Hawaiian and western cultures. The poem captures the trauma of dispossession and an overall lack of direction that has been felt by Kānaka Maoli since the overthrow of the Hawaiian kingdom: Westlake’s seemingly careless “dumping” of letters on the page can be read as a metaphor for the Kānaka Maoli experience of being dumped on by the non-Hawaiian societal majority. Unlike the linear, organized, and “progressive” manner in which we are trained to read characters in English, from left to right, the scattered placement of the letters on the page also evokes a cyclical Hawaiian sense of time, a different pattern and order to the universe; it challenges readers to break out of a linear mode of thinking, and Kānaka Maoli to resist the conformity of western institutions.

A popular form of contemporary Hawaiian poetry is the combination of Hawaiian poetic text with visual images, as exemplified by poet artists such as Īmaikalani Kalāhele and Meleanna Meyer.

Kalāhele’s poem “H-3: A Series of Questions” addresses the issue of the destruction of sacred Hawaiian sites on the island of O‘ahu during the building of Hawai‘i’s third major freeway system, H-3 (1998, 164–165). The freeway links two military complexes: Pearl Harbor Naval Base and Hickam Air Base on the leeward side of the island, and Kāne‘ohe Marine Corps Air Station on the windward side. Due to tireless community opposition, H-3 was in development for over thirty years before its completion in December 1997. The message conveyed in Kalāhele’s sparse prose, composed in the mid-1980s but still relevant years later, cuts through the thousands of pages and hours of testimony given to this issue over the decades.

H-3. A series of questions.

25 years?

Going where?

For what?

Come on, bra.

25 years?

For what?

Going where?

Complimenting the word text of the poem, the visual image frames the issue in a Hawaiian context (figure 3). The center depicts the Ha‘ikū por-

tion of the freeway, which cuts across the scenic mountains. The mo'o (lizard) figure is a traditional 'aumakua associated with the area, and its dominant position on the mountain above the freeway, along with its curved body, suggest a protective as well as somewhat menacing presence. The graphic motifs in the background, based on traditional kapa and kākau (tattoo) designs, suggest the methodical razing of sacred sites by bulldozers, with the curved triangular pattern reminiscent of both tire tracks and teeth, devouring the land. The placement of the mo'o's right elbow outside the frame of the picture can be read as a resistance to western form and to the destruction of sacred native sites—an artistic and cultural sign of defiance.

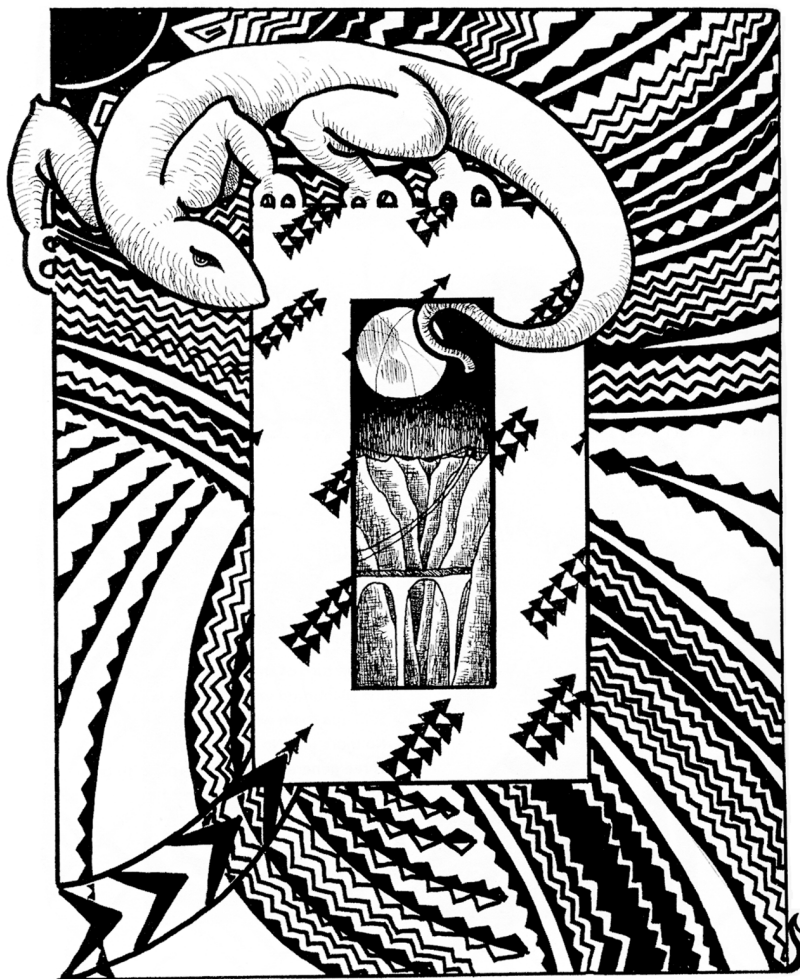


FIGURE 3

Meleanna Meyer’s “Pehea lā e pono ai?” includes a haunting visual with her text, which also speaks of the negative effects of colonization (2002, 31).

Pehea lā e pono ai?

(How are we to make right?)

Uncle Sam, demon juggler of stolen spoils,
of lives laid to waste.

You’ve tried to break our spirits but we
remain steadfast—

How will this be made right?

While acknowledging the suffering Hawaiians have endured due to the overthrow of our nation by the United States—“stolen spoils,” “lives laid to waste”—the poem repeats the patriotic message of aloha ‘āina—steadfastness to the land. The visual image reinforces this message, with the chasm (symbolizing Hawaiians cut off from our culture) bridged by a kanaka figure, possibly representing our own leaders, who will lead us to



FIGURE 4

a more promising future and demand that past grievances are addressed. The rainbow arching above, while composed of American flag-like symbols, suggests hope (figure 4).

Other artists, like Moana Kaho‘ohanohano and Kapulani Landgraf, have combined text with photography, as in Kaho‘ohanohano’s linked poems, “Mana Wahine” and “Mana Kāne” (1998, 110–111):

She is your Grandmother
My Mother’s Aunty
Your neighbor’s Tūtū Lady
Our Kūpuna

Her eyes mirror
A lifetime of struggle
A language fading
A culture diminishing

Mana Wahine

She loves and shelters
Placing her hopes in her children
They will perpetuate a culture by learning
They will perpetuate a race by surviving

Mana Wahine

He is your Grandfather
My Father’s Uncle
Your neighbor’s Tūtū Man
Our Kūpuna

Mana Kāne

His eyes hold
a lifetime of broken promises
A home stolen
A future denied

Mana Kāne

He educates and disciplines
Giving his children the tools to succeed
They will become warriors of a modern war
They will become leaders of a new kingdom

Mana Kāne



FIGURE 5

The photo collage that accompanies Kaho‘ohanohano’s two poems visually represents the disjunction of Kānaka Maoli from our culture, our land, our language, our traditions (figure 5). The visual portrait is fractured, like our society, begging to be made whole. Unlike Kalāhele’s and Meyer’s images, which reinforce the accompanying textual messages, Kaho‘ohanohano’s ripped and disconnected photos counter the tone of both poems, which is hopeful and defiant.

Perhaps one reason the combination of text with visual image has been so widely implemented in contemporary Hawaiian poetry is because it is a literary way of expressing Hawaiian preferences for mixed artistic forms that inform and complement each other. Throughout the centuries that Hawaiian poetry existed in a purely oral form, it was often choreographed and presented as hula or accompanied by musical implements and chanted or sung. With the coming of paper and pen, art and photography have become new ways of visualizing the poetic text, as hula does in the performance mele genre.

Asian Influences on Contemporary Form: The Haiku

With the great influx of Asian immigrants to work the sugar plantations of Hawai‘i in the nineteenth century, it is no surprise that Asian forms of poetry, such as haiku, have been woven into the contemporary lei mele Hawai‘i. One of the best examples of Hawaiian use of the haiku form and Hawaiian imagery is in Moses Kahumoku’s “Lehua Kalo” (1982, 48). The poem begins:

Lehua kalo
White marbled moon approaches
A time for planting

The poem is made up of twelve stanzas, which suggest the twelve months of the calendar year, and by extension, different planting seasons. On its own each stanza is a complete haiku; read together, the stanzas are linked thematically, focused on one of the most important cultural metaphors of Hawaiian culture and literature, kalo (taro). The staple crop of Hawaiians, the kalo plant is described in traditional mo‘olelo as the progenitor and elder sibling of the Lāhui Hawai‘i (Hawaiian people). This relationship is the foundation of one of the most important ideas of Hawaiian culture, that of aloha or mālama ‘āina, to love, cherish, and protect the land as family (Kame‘eleihiwa 1992).

Like Westlake’s concrete poems, Kahumoku’s haiku “Lehua Kalo” chal-

lenges the reader to resist and break out of linear thinking; while each stanza can stand alone or link to the next, they do not necessarily link together in a linear fashion. Rather, the stanzas can be read down, across, or in any random order. In this poem, Kahumoku sticks with very old, traditional themes and images of kalo and elements that surround it—the planting and harvesting seasons, the making of poi, the eating of food. Lehua, ‘Uahi-a-Pele, Mana‘ulu, and ‘O‘opu-kai are all old varieties of kalo, which evoke different images and messages, providing layers of kaona in each stanza. For example, the lehua kalo is named for the red sap it exudes when cut; the sap has been compared to blood, which some Hawaiians say proves the familial connection between kalo and kākāka (Ka‘imikaua 1992).

Kahumoku uses food references to touch the past when he pairs poi with important traditional foods—fish (*manini*, *aku*, *akule*, *ahi*) and pork (*italics in original*):

Poi with manini

Aku, akule, ahi

Spam, sardines and pig

He brings this to the present with the inclusion of imported foreign and tinned varieties of fish and pig: sardines and SPAM lunchmeat, which for most Kākāka Maoli have come to replace the previously mentioned native foods. These symbolize the loss of the traditional lifestyles of fishing and farming, and mark the transition to the new, postindustrial, tourism-based economy. Many Kākāka Maoli were displaced from their traditional farming lands to make room for development by overseas multinational companies, which have covered rich farming lands with sprawling resort complexes. Canned sardines and SPAM lunchmeat are not universal staples in Hawai‘i; they are associated with the “local” working class, which Kahumoku fondly asserts as a positive image, countering elitist haole attitudes of superiority. While nostalgic in tone, Kahumoku’s images eloquently speak to the effects of colonialism and the separation of Kākāka Maoli from cultural practices and native land base.

Ma ka ‘Ōlelo “Pidgin”: Hawai‘i Creole English and Contemporary Hawaiian Poetry

While Hawaiian-language compositions are still common in mele that are sung choreographed to hula, they are rare in contemporary Hawaiian written poetry. Many Hawaiian poets incorporate words, lines, or stanzas

of Hawaiian, sometimes referencing traditional Hawaiian mele, such as Mahealani Kamau'u's "Calvary at 'Ānaeho'omalū" (1989, 15; italics in original):

- I stand at Christ's tree,
 And from another temple
 Illumined by oils of kukui hele pō
 And the moon goddess Hina,
 25 An intoxication of holy communion:
 From a stranger's silver chalice pours
 The dark blood of ancestors.
- Pulsating
 Blood and sinew
 30 Sensate with the drumming of pahu,
 Clash of ka lā'au,
 Rattle of kūpe'e,
 Rapping of ipu heke;
 Voices rise out of shadows
 35 And intone an ancient cadence:
- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------|
| E Laka e | <i>(Oh Laka</i> |
| Pūpū weuweu | <i>Oh wild wood bouquet</i> |
| E Laka e | <i>Oh Laka</i> |
| 'Ano'ai aloha e | <i>Greetings and salutations</i> |
| 40 'Ano'ai aloha e | <i>Greetings and salutations</i> |
| 'Ano'ai aloha e | <i>Greetings and salutations)</i> |

Kamau'u's poem contrasts the images of Christianity and Hawaiian religion. The speaker is standing in a hotel lobby before a Christmas tree decorated with Hawaiian cultural objects that once held a sacred and functional place in traditional Hawaiian society. But now they are mere adornments on a tree representing a foreign religion that replaced the native religion. The speaker has a spiritual experience not unlike the speaker in Burgess's "Hawai'i Pono'i," in which the voices of the past are directly communicating with Kānaka Maoli in the present. In "Hawai'i Pono'i," Pua is addressed by Queen Lili'uokalani. In "Calvary at 'Ānaeho'omalū," the narrator sees a vision and hears a traditional chant intoned for the hula goddess Laka. The juxtaposition of images subverts the dominance of haole culture represented by the hotel (capitalism) and religion (Christianity), and the white male authority each implies, as the ancient goddess of the land, Laka, is called on—a subtle but strong message of resistance.

Poets Lokahi Antonio and Kimo Armitage are two Kānaka Maoli who have composed contemporary Hawaiian poetry completely in the Hawaiian language. Neither Antonio’s poem “Nee ka Moo” (1998, 184) nor Armitage’s piece “E Tūtū-Kāne, ‘Auhea ‘Oe?” (2002) has been translated in publication. Like the untranslated lines in Katana’s “Cozmagany,” these texts are closed to those who lack facility in the language. This choice supports one line of thought among Hawaiian scholars today that argues that translating Hawaiian to English diminishes the value of Hawaiian or fails to capture the true expression of the poem. Along this line, Antonio’s piece also does not incorporate the ‘okina (glottal stop) or kahakō (macron), two diacritical marks that were invented in the postcontact period of Hawaiian history to demonstrate certain stresses and to mark certain pronunciations. Some Hawaiian language scholars believe that the insertion of diacritical marks imposes a particular meaning on a text, and when one is working with an older text, or a text in which the composer cannot be consulted, a determination cannot always be made with absolute certainty. Likewise, some scholars argue that marking a word takes away from the ambiguity of meaning, when the ambiguity or multiplicity of meaning is what is desired.

Antonio’s poem describes the mo‘o, the godly lizard-like Hawaiian guardian creature that populates the Hawaiian environment and imagination. When this written poem is read aloud, the staccato rhythm parallels the action described by the poem, the creeping movement of the mo‘o. The poem begins:

Nee ka moo, ka moo nee
 Neenee aku, neenee mai
 Mai ka po mai ka moo, puka i ke ao,
 Ke ao kanaka, ke au e nee nei

This short extract from a poem close to one hundred lines long displays multiple instances of language play. First, Antonio has created a “pono” (balanced) imagery in several ways—flipping the first line, which creates a kind of internal rhyme while replicating the balance between the noun (moo) and verb (nee); then, the commonly paired opposites aku and mai (“going” and “coming”) evoke the same sense of harmony, as does the pairing of po (night/chaos) and ao (day/order). In addition, Antonio has used the important Hawaiian technique of linking the last word of one line with the same (or a similar) word at the beginning of the next line: *nee/Neenee* in lines 1 and 2, *mai/Mai* in lines 2 and 3, and *ao/Ke ao* in lines 3 and 4. The lines also play with the sounds (and meanings) of the words

ao (day/enlightened) and *au* (time/current). Further, these words, without diacritical marks, challenge the reader: are other meanings implied? What about the words *a'o*, *'au*, or *āu*? The purposeful use of untranslated and unmarked Hawaiian text contributes a richness to the poem that invites a much longer critical analysis.

Armitage's piece "E Tūtū-Kāne, 'Auhea 'Oe?" was also printed without translation (2002, 115), while a translation has been included in live literary performances. Excerpts from the poem sum up the central theme of the poem, the horrific result of Kānaka Maoli being cut off from language and cultural practices (translation by Noelani Arista and Mahealani Wong):

E Tūtū-kāne, 'auhea 'oe?	O Grandfather, where are you?
Pono mākou iā 'oe	We need you
'A'ale maopopo ka lawai'a 'ana	We no longer know how to fish
Ua poina nā lua he'e	We have forgotten the octopus holes
A wīwī ka'u mau keiki	And my children are starving
Ua malo'o nā kalo a pau	All of the taro is withered
Ma kāu lo'i	In your taro gardens
A 'a'ale maopopo ke kanu 'ana	And the methods of planting are not known to us
A wīwī ka'u mau keiki	And my children are starving
'A'ale hiki ke pule	We cannot pray
Pono e nānā i ka puke wehewehe,	We need to look to the dictionary
I nā hua 'ōlelo	For the words
Nui loa kēia hana	This is a tremendous burden
A wīwī ko'u 'uhane	And my soul is starving

This poem uses a traditional opening line, addressing the named person with the question, "'Auhea 'oe," (Where are you?), which can also be read as a statement/command, "Listen to me." Each paukū ends with a repeated line ("A wīwī ka'u mau keiki") with a variant at the end ("A wīwī ko'u 'uhane"), a common form in traditional Hawaiian poetry. The speaker directly addresses issues of colonization through the images of traditional knowledge of fishing and farming being forgotten, leading to physical starvation as the speaker has no means to provide for his family, as well as spiritual starvation from being cut off from these cultural practices. The use of Hawaiian language as the medium to convey the message directs the poem to a particular audience, a communally understood message of suffering, grievance, and loss not meant for a general audience.

Far more common in contemporary Hawaiian poetry is the use of Hawai'i Creole English, or Hawaiian Pidgin. This change in language is

what marks and sets it apart from traditional poetry. Stripped of our ancestral language, most contemporary Hawaiian poets have preferred to use Hawai‘i Creole English over “standard” English as another form of resistance to haole colonization, as well as a way of exerting a stronger identification with “local” (non-haole and elitist) culture.

A transitional piece of contemporary Hawaiian poetry is Sam Gon III’s “Pō Hakioawa/Night at Hakioawa,” composed in Hawaiian, and translated in Hawai‘i Creole English (1993, 157; italics in original):

<i>Mai huikau:</i>	No come all scared:
<i>He tūtū wale</i>	‘As only <i>tūtū</i> [grandma]
<i>i nānā mai ai</i>	Come for watch us
<i>‘A’ole kepalō</i>	Not <i>kepalō</i> [the devil].

Lisa Linn Kanae’s poem “Sacred Heart Church” uses a strong Pidgin voice, but provides a context that makes it accessible to non-Pidgin speakers (1998, 191):

I dial God’s number;
 first I dab my forehead;
inaname ada faa-dah,
 then my heart; *anna sun*,
 left shoulder; *anna ho-o-lee*,
 right shoulder; *spee-ret*,
 and then my lips; *ah-men*.

Hawai‘i Creole English has often been associated with children, or with younger voices. In Kanae’s poem, the speaker is a young girl attending Catholic school. This is echoed in other youth-centered poems, such as Danielle Kai‘ulani Kauihou’s “‘Cause” (2002, 94):

Da house always dirty
 so I clean ‘um
 not fo’ my mom
 jus’ ‘cause I like
 . . .
 Plenny stuffs I do
 not fo’ you
 not fo’ dem
 jus’ ‘cause I like.

The title of Cathy Kanoelani Ikeda’s poem “Max Was He,” draws on the image of graffiti on the bathroom wall, an image that resonates with the tone of hopelessness in the poem, as a young local man contemplates

his life and does not see much of a future for himself, compared to high school classmates he had dismissed as “uncool” who, as adults, are now successful (1998, 289–290):

- 10 Your vacant eyes stare at the surf.
 I think you're dead,
 Just sitting there
 As a cigarette threatens to burn your fingers.
 “What's wrong?” I ask.
- 15 You say nothing for what seems like forever,
 More like three sets.
 I have nothing better to do,
 I count the waves
 And try not to go deaf.
- 20 Then your petroglyph tattoo moves.
 You turn the tape down,
 And your voice, so serene in the
 Violent ringing of my ears, tells me,
 “Life's screwed!
 I thought everything was going be so simple,
- 25 Surf, cruise, party, surf again
 Just the way we dreamed about, remember?
 But I neva dream about this.
 You saw Joey Wong's picture in the paper?
 The one that talks about the doctors they get
 At their hospital?
- 30 Kaiser or something?
 Joey, the one Andy wen corner in the bathroom
 5th grade time
 And Joey wen get so scared he piss his pants
 ‘Ass how come we used to call him
- 35 Shishi Boy in high school
 He one fricken obstetrician.
 Then get Randy, he playing pro ball
 Up the mainland someplace,
 And Tammie, the one we used to call giraffe
- 40 Stay modeling in Paris
 And I see her in the Liberty House
 Catalogs sometimes, Zooper Sale, li'dat.
 And then get Lei,
 The one who asked Michael to the prom
- 45 Then Paka boy, then Scotty

And she wen get rejected by all of them,
 How the hell we knew she would be Miss Hawai‘i?
 She neva look like that in high school.

...

Nobody told me
 All my dreaming wasn’t going be enough
 And after ten years of this
 70 It ain’t enough
 And I stay lost
 Like I going disappear in the foam
 And nobody going give a rip,
 No one going know I gone.”

The use of Hawai‘i Creole English, combined with the context and images in the poem, identifies the speaker as local and working class; lines 63–66 reveal that, ten years after high school graduation, he still lives at home: “Same house, same room/My mother doing my laundry/And bitchin at me about finding one job/And keeping em.” It speaks to the disparity between his unenviable situation and that of his successful classmates, who the poem implies are not HCE speakers and therefore have successful and glamorous careers. Moreover, it addresses the negative effects of colonialism and the difficulty of reconciling two worldviews.

While the use of Hawai‘i Pidgin anchors contemporary Hawaiian poetry to Hawai‘i, it is interesting to note that, unlike Hawaiian or English, poetic conventions of Pidgin language use have not yet been established. It is conceivable that as the body of poetry and other literary genres written in Hawai‘i Creole English grows, linguistic conventions will continue to develop organically.

HA‘INA ‘IA MAI ANA KA PUANA (CONCLUSION)

“Ha‘ina ‘ia mai ana ka puana” (Thus my story has come to an end). The long history of traditional Hawaiian poetry developed in the nurturing embrace of oral tradition for nearly two thousand years before western interference. Literacy flourished in Hawai‘i in the nineteenth century—Kānaka Maoli enthusiastically set out to use the new technology to record oral traditions in writing, using pen and paper to archive mele. During this period they also experimented with and developed new forms of mele, such as hula ku‘i. After the Hawaiian language was banned and the native government overthrown, there was a brief period when Hawaiian poetry

was carried forward into the twentieth century by entertainers—singers, dancers, and musicians, keeping the performance aspect of Hawaiian poetry alive. When it reemerged during the Hawaiian Renaissance of the 1960s as “contemporary Hawaiian poetry,” it was written primarily in English and Hawai‘i Creole English. Hawaiian-language compositions still thrived in the realm of entertainment, particularly in the context of the revival of the hula, and interest in the Hawaiian cultural arts was renewed. Since then, some poets have continued to compose in Hawaiian, but what began centuries ago as a lei comprising only indigenous language, thought, and form has grown and diversified as new strands became interwoven into the lei mele Hawai‘i. In this time, something unique has been created—the “weaving together of disconnected strands, interconnecting them into something else” (Monica Kaimipono Kaiwi, personal interview, 23 July 2002).

That “something else” has been a merging of Hawaiian thought, metaphors, *kaona*, and other cultural articulations with some western forms, the most popular of which are the less restrictive open forms such as free verse and performance poetry. Some of the thought, metaphors, and *kaona* are still traditional, with ideas of *aloha* and *mālama ‘āina* most prevalent. Thus themes of resistance to colonization and loyalty to Hawaiian culture and cultural practices are often articulated in Hawaiian poetry. Even in the precontact era, *wānana* (prophecies) in mele such as “Au‘a ‘ia” foretold of the coming of foreigners and loss of land, and they sent a message of warning to Kānaka Maoli to hold fast to the land and culture. It is perhaps in this spirit of resistance to colonialism that Kānaka Maoli have widely resisted boxing their poetic *mana‘o* (expression) into constricting western forms, as another way to *kū‘ē* (resist, oppose) *haole* attempts to take away our cultural practices and assimilate Kānaka Maoli into a homogeneous American (and nonnative) mold.

Related to themes of resistance and loyalty to culture is the issue of language and forced dispossession of it. Kanaka Maoli poet Wayne Kaumuali‘i Westlake described it best when he wrote, “Language the missionaries taught us was broken glass. / Our tongues are still bleeding” (Westlake 1979, 32). Yet Kānaka Maoli have managed to recover our collective voices, albeit in a new form: for some, like ‘Īmaikalani Kalāhele, Hawai‘i Creole English has become a new weapon of resistance to colonization. For others, like Haunani-Kay Trask, English has become the new vehicle of eloquent and poignant expression; as African writer Chinua Achebe put it, “I have been given the language and I intend to use it” (quoted in Wa Thiong’o 1981, 7).

Can mele Hawai‘i even be categorized in western terms? Only in the broadest sense: much of it has elements of lyric poetry; narrative, epic, and other structures can also be identified. Yet there is seldom a neat fit into any particular category. Rather, it is similar to contemporary Hawaiian music, which Stillman has said often defies classification in both traditional Hawaiian and western categories.²¹ The Kanaka Maoli rap group Sudden Rush has shirked western labels altogether, promoting their high-energy fusion of hip-hop and Hawaiian chant as mele pāleoleo, Hawaiian rap.

Despite its growing popularity, mele pāleoleo, like other forms of Hawaiian performance poetry, is still overlooked as a legitimate form of culturally conceived poetic expression. While poetry in performance has continued virtually uninterrupted from traditional times within hālau hula (hula schools), it has reemerged as a dynamic element in contemporary Hawaiian poetry, with spoken-word performers gaining popularity due to rap and hip-hop influences. They, along with Kanaka Maoli chanters, dancers, musicians, artists, and poets who still create, perform, write, and publish in the Hawaiian language, in Hawai‘i Creole English, and in English, will continue to weave the Hawaiian lei mele into an enduring and perpetual symbol of Hawaiian cultural tradition—a lei ho‘oheno no nā kau a kau, a lei to be cherished for all seasons.

Notes

I have used modern Hawaiian spelling and diacritics in all Hawaiian texts quoted in this article, with the exception of Antonio’s poem, “Nee ka Moo,” per his preference. Unless otherwise noted, all definitions of Hawaiian words are taken from the *Hawaiian Dictionary*, revised and enlarged edition, by Mary Kawena Pukui and Samuel H Elbert (1986).

1 For Hawaiians, the terms *‘Ōiwi*, *Lāhui*, *Kānaka Maoli*, *Native Hawaiian*, and *Hawaiian* are synonymous, and I use them interchangeably here. Federal and state laws define Hawaiians as individuals who can trace ancestry back to the aboriginal inhabitants of the Hawaiian Islands at the time of first western contact in 1778. Legal distinctions between Native Hawaiians (whom they define as those with 50 percent or more aboriginal blood) and Hawaiians (whom they define as those with less than 50 percent aboriginal blood) have been problematic for Kānaka Maoli, who have been divided by the blood quantum issue. It can be confusing, as different federal statutes define Native Hawaiian in different ways. It is important to note that blood quantum distinctions have come out of western and not Kanaka Maoli culture; that is, prior to colonization, Kānaka Maoli never

discriminated against each other along the lines of blood quantum, which is separate from cultural protocols regarding mo'okū'auhau (genealogical lines). As these western classifications of blood quantum have been used as weapons against Kānaka Maoli to divide our communities, many have decided to reject the colonial terms all together in favor of the indigenous terms, *Nā 'Ōiwi*, *Lāhui*, and *Kānaka Maoli*, the real (maoli) people (kānaka). See 15 HAW.REV.STAT.ANN.331 (Michie 1997); section 201(a)(7) of the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act, 1920, ch 42, 42 Stat 108 [1921]: <<http://www.hawaii-nation.org/hhca.html>>; and Van Dyke 1998.

2 Hawai'i Creole English is more commonly (although somewhat incorrectly, according to linguists) referred to as "Pidgin." It initially developed as a means of communication between Hawaiians and foreigners after the arrival of Captain Cook in 1778. It reached peak development in the 1880s–1920s, as a mixing of Hawaiian, English, and the languages of immigrants brought in to work the sugar plantations, such as Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino (Tagalog, Ilocano), Puerto Rican, and Portuguese (Day 1987).

3 The word *pua* is rich in meaning. Translated literally as "flower" or "blossom," *pua* also means "to issue, appear, come forth, emerge, said especially of smoke, wind, *speech*, and colors, hence to smoke, blow, *speak*, shine" (emphasis added). The written word, as an extension of the spoken word, is another form of *pua*. *Pua* also refers to "progeny, child, descendant, offspring," either physically or metaphorically; thus it can easily refer to poetic compositions. Similarly, the word *puana* (a formulaic line often used in certain genres of Hawaiian mele) is based on the root meaning "pronunciation, utterance," to speak, say.

4 Translations between languages are always difficult. In *The Echo of Our Song*, Mary Kawena Pukui and Alfons Korn discussed the meaning of the title of their collection of mele (which include translations for all the texts it contains), stating, "No translation of a poem can achieve quite the same results as the real thing. Just as an echo can never take the place of the original voice, so a poem-in-translation, however much it may try to become a 'reasonable' facsimile, can never take the place of the living poem, in its primary language, and as known to its native audience" (1973, ix). Linguist Samuel H Elbert made similar comments regarding the issue of meaning of poetic images. The aim of his article "Symbolism in Hawaiian Poetry" was to show "that symbols are not universals, that Hawaiian symbols are not the same as Euro-American ones, and that the translator's task is challengingly difficult" (1962, 389). Translation is made more difficult when multiplicities of meaning, connotation, and innuendo in specific words, and images, metaphors, or other elements of the poem are considered, as these layers of meaning are often lost in translation without copious footnotes. Despite the limitations of translation, it is possible to glimpse at least the surface layer of meaning in a poem and gain some insight and appreciation of this most wonderful aspect of Hawaiian oral—and now written—tradition.

5 In *The Kumulipo: A Hawaiian Creation Chant*, Beckwith noted, “In 1881 a few foreign scholars learned of the Kumulipo through a German translation of a fragment. . . . King Kalakaua, who had inherited this chant composed for one of his ancestors, had graciously loaned his manuscript copy (written down by an unknown hand) to [German anthropologist] Adolf Bastian” (1972, x). Kalākaua’s version is included in the appendix to Beckwith 1972; see also Kukahi 1902 and Lili‘uokalani 1978 [1897].

6 There are only thirteen letters in the Hawaiian alphabet: the vowels *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, and *u*, and the consonants *h*, *k*, *l*, *m*, *n*, *p*, *w*, along with the ‘*okina* or glottal stop, which functions as a consonant.

7 The word *uka* (inland, mountain) connotes land, contrasted with *kai* (sea).

8 The proper noun for the species represents the category of *i‘a* (fish) here in place of the word *i‘a*.

9 The words *lī* and *lā* do not mean “narrow” and “broad.” They are being used metaphorically, as the vowel sound “i” (pronounced “ee” like “squeak”) evokes a sense of narrowness, as in the word *hāiki*, or narrow (the mouth also constricts when forming the sound). Similarly, the vowel sound “a” (as in “all”) evokes a sense of wideness, as in the word *laulā*, or broad (the mouth also opens up when forming this sound).

10 Translated as “earth,” the word *nuku* implies dirt or soil. Nuku, however, translates to “entrance, as of a harbor, river, or mountain pass or gap.” Therefore, it seems to be an allusion to the coastal estuaries, which are rich feeding grounds for fish. The reference to the mountain may fit as well (see the chant “Ka Wai a Kāne” [also titled “He Mele no Kane”] in Emerson 1997 [1907]: 257–259). The word *kai* specifically refers to ocean or salt water, as opposed to *wai*, fresh potable water.

11 Independent presses were those not controlled by the government or missionaries. See Chapin 1996.

12 Some stories published included *The Count of Monte Cristo*, *Tarzan*, *A History of Napoleon Bonaparte*, and William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. See Johnson 1976.

13 Excellent analyses of this time period can be found in Trask 1999; Silva 1999; and the documentary *Act of War: The Overthrow of the Hawaiian Nation* (Honolulu: Nā Maka o ka ‘Āina Productions and the Center for Hawaiian Studies, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, 1993).

14 See Larry Kimura’s discussion of the rise of Pidgin in “Native Hawaiian Culture” (1985).

15 Traditionally, the *pū‘olo* was constructed from plain ti leaves, wrapped around the lei to keep it fresh and unbruised. Once the lei was presented to the recipient, the *pū‘olo* was discarded.

16 There are different versions of the *mo‘olelo* of Hāloanaka, the taro-child of Wākea and Papa (and in some accounts, Ho‘ohōkūkalani), as being the elder sib-

ling of Hāloa, the first kanaka and progenitor of the Hawaiian people (Kame'e-leihiwa 1992, 24).

17 One example from traditional literature is "Hula Manō nō Kalani'ōpu'u" (Shark God Chant for [chief] Kalani'ōpu'u) in Pukui and Korn 1973, 3–8. Examples from contemporary literature include compositions by Frank Kawaikapuokalani Hewett, such as "Halalū" (Young Akule [fish]) (1981). Handsome or desirable men were compared to the ulua fish, particularly in love songs (Pukui and Elbert 1986, 369).

18 Other examples include "He 'Ono" (Oh How Delicious) by Bina Mossman (2003), and "Ka 'Uluwehi o ke Kai" (The Delicacies Abundant in the Sea) by Edith Kanaka'ole (2003).

19 This isn't to say that Hawaiians were never attacked by sharks. On the contrary, many traditional mo'olelo and mele warn that sharks can be harmful. Yet as ocean-faring people, Hawaiians respected more than feared sharks and their ocean realm. See Beckwith 1970; Kawaharada 1994.

20 The act of eating is an important symbol in Hawaiian poetry, perhaps best exemplified in the protest song, "Mele 'Ai Pōhaku" (Rock Eating Song), in which Hawaiians proclaimed they would rather "eat rocks" than accept annexation to the United States. See Stillman 1999; Ho'omanawanui in preparation.

21 Stillman proposed applying the label "contemporary Hawaiian songs" to the newly composed repertoire "whose subject matter is relevant to contemporary social and cultural concerns." Some such songs adhere to formats of hula ku'i, mele Hawai'i, or hapa haole songs, and others do not. (1998, 91).

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Abstract

Hawaiian poetry developed in the nurturing embrace of oral tradition for nearly two thousand years before American missionaries introduced writing in the 1820s. Once literacy was established, Native Hawaiians enthusiastically set out to use the new technology to record their oral traditions in writing. During this period they also experimented with and developed new forms of mele, such as hula ku‘i. After the Hawaiian language was banned and the government overthrown in the late nineteenth century, there was a period where Hawaiian poetry was carried forward into the twentieth century by entertainers—singers, dancers, and musicians—who kept the performance aspect of Hawaiian poetry alive. The art of Hawaiian poetry was transformed in the latter half of the twentieth century, when haku mele (poets) began to write primarily in English and Hawai‘i Creole English while still maintaining Hawaiian themes and utilizing traditional metaphors. Since then, contemporary Hawaiian poetry in these languages has thrived alongside Hawaiian-language compositions, which are still perpetuated, mostly through the practice of hula. Today, Hawaiian poetry can be best described by using the metaphor of a haku lei, where different strands of language and influence are woven together to create something beautiful and unique, an enduring and perpetual symbol of Hawaiian cultural tradition—a lei ho‘oheno no nā kau a kau, a lei to be cherished for all seasons.

KEYWORDS: Hawaiian poetry, form, performance, Hawaiian literature